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Non-Fiction (1,174 Words)

Leonard Cohen Hated Me (Maybe Not)

Los Angeles, 1992: I used to go to Leonard Cohen's place once a week or so to help navigate and refine his computer, a Macintosh SE/30. Cohen adopted the Apple Mac experience early on and used it extensively for his original artworks. He was pretty killer with a WACOM tablet, too.

Yes, Leonard Cohen and I shared many a late night together. Way more than mere tech, we'd often spend hours lost in obscure art, food, philosophy, tea, and so on.

We even planned a future writing collaboration. A chapbook, maybe. Cohen loved that I was a smalltime internationally published poet in my early 20s. He thought the work was "...very visual; quite excellent, indeed, especially for one so young." Hah! Seems silly to think of now.

Believe it or not, at the time in LA I had no idea who Leonard Cohen even was. To me he was an unknown older cat who'd done a little poetry of his own, plus a few obscure vinyls in the days. He seemed the average middle-aged dude living solo in a cool pad stocked with books, paintings, hippie relics, fancy eats. No understanding, on my side, to match his name with the legacy.

I feel right stupid about it now, of course. And as it went, our friendship was not to last. You see, on a particular visit to his apartment/studio one crystalline LA eve, I caused Cohen to lose a huge stash of his personally created digital still life images. His "gems" as he called them: Nudes, portraits, landscapes.

Originals, of course. All of them painstakingly crafted using the latest Apple Macintosh tools of the era. No backups, either. All gone. Forever.

Oy.

These works were incredibly precious to Cohen, and God only knows where they might've shown by now: MoMA, Brett Wesley Gallery, Musée du Louvre...

Realistically, Cohen shared equal fault in it all—and though I shoulda been way more careful, what Cohen had going was totally unorthodox.

Leonard Cohen, while sharp with a WACOM tablet, and Photoshop and Painter too, really had no idea about the Apple proprietary interface. Thus, instead of hitting “Save” and storing his files as one would normally do, he was cutting and pasting his completed digital artwork right into the Mac’s “Scrapbook” desk accessory.

The Scrapbook was a nifty 80s Apple holdover, intended for things used in a more or less repetitive manner: signatures, logos, notes, all available for quick placement to application files, via the desk accessory under the Apple menu (rainbow mini-icon in the upper left).

But mid-1992, nobody really used Apple Scrapbook anymore, anyway. Except for Leonard Cohen.

Kidding about that...but not by far. Continuing:

Cohen had some serious Apple tech problems one day, so I came by at night and low-level formatted his hard disk and custom reinstalled his System Software. Part of this process involved removing the Scrapbook’s external storage, which Apple called “Scrapbook File”. This item was kept inside the System Folder itself, and in those days the file would sometimes corrupt and cause the computer to hang...if the Scrapbook was even active.

But nobody really used the Scrapbook anymore, right? Except for Leonard Cohen.

As it went, I sat there in front of his SE/30, just a couple small steps from erasing the disk. Copied all his files to an external drive, ready to go.

But something felt off when I noticed the Scrapbook File was much larger than normal. So I opened the Scrapbook itself. Inside were duplicates of Cohen’s art, images I’d seen for weeks. I thought it was odd for him to have so many (all?) of these pics in the Scrapbook. Hm.

I checked his “Work” folder: Lots of TIFF files (images), many of them labeled with names similar to those in the Scrapbook. Okay, duplicates. “So Leonard—you don’t actually use the Scrapbook for anything, do you?”

He leaned into the screen. “No idea what that is,” he said.

My response? “Alright, cool.”

Yeah, I *shoulda* left the Scrapbook open, and I *shoulda* made completely sure he visually associated the Scrapbook with the Scrapbook File. But nobody used the Scrapbook anymore, anyway...so it was said.

I continued the overhaul, erased the disk, custom reinstalled the 1992 OS from floppy disk scratch, redefined all the digital nuts and bolts. The computer ran fantastically afterward: much quicker, completely error free, very clean. Cohen was happy as hell and extremely thankful. Problems that plagued him were gone, and he loved some of the organic rearranging I did for him (a paradigm that would later become my personal trademark in Apple’s professional scene).

Yes, Leonard Cohen, *the* Leonard Cohen, was excited and back to work. Yay! And he couldn’t *wait* to cut a check for my time...til he clicked the Scrapbook.

“Where’s my work?!?” he cried. I pointed to his Work folder, which I’d safely returned to his drive. “Right there. Back where it was,” I said.

“No, no, no! My *work!*” I was confused. “Leonard, the Work folder’s right there!”

“No! Look!” He flipped through the Scrapbook pages. In 1992 there were probably six default samples in the Scrapbook, things like a cartoon palm tree and a smiley face. The silly tone of these stock Apple pics was salting Cohen wounds by the second.

“They’re gone! They’re all gone!!” he yelled. And finally, I got what he was talking about. *Uh, oh.*

“Leonard, you’ve been saving your work in the *Scrapbook*? Then what’re all these files in the Work folder?”

“I don’t know about those, and I don’t care! My work’s gone! It’s all gone!!”

So there we sat, his files toast. He was utterly devastated. Mortified. Enraged. A few beats later he suddenly stands and says, “You should leave. Yes, you have to leave.”

In a fit of angry tears, Leonard Cohen, *the* Leonard Cohen, threw me out of his pad and into the night.

I neither saw nor heard from him again.

Walking back to the car in the gentle night I thought about offering Cohen a disk recovery, using the tools of the day.

But the drive was erased by low-level security wipes, so recovery was likely impossible...save for divine intervention or ekpyrotic fold.

I forgot about Leonard Cohen over the years. As I said, to me he was just an older cool dude who sang songs and made some art. Thus it was not until 2006 that I came to realize what Cohen's work had actually meant to the canvas of history:

Yes, I was at Sunset 5 movie theatre in LA (gone) waiting for some indie flick or another. Lights go down, then a trailer for the documentary LEONARD COHEN: I'M YOUR MAN hits the screen. What the hell? *Leonard Cohen*? Why would anyone do a feature doc about *that guy*!?

In 2006 I had 14,000+ tracks in iTunes (now known as Apple Music): the great composers, movie music, jazz, obscure bands, popular rock, punk, etc.

A vast cross-section of damned near everything relevant since the year 1600.

Except for Leonard Cohen. Damn.



Leonard Cohen, RIP
(Photographer Unknown)